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THE ZÜRICH INTERNATIONAL
SOCIALIST AND LABOUR CONGRESS.

(BY A SOCIALIST.)

It is no easy matter to re-establish the International Workers' Association. The collapse of the old International, after the fall of the Paris Commune, has left behind it so long a trail of personal animosities that the reunion of the Socialist parties of different countries can only be accomplished slowly and with prudence. In one respect, however, a great progress has been accomplished. All the various schools have disappeared. Cabinetists, Fourierists, Mutualists have ceased to exist or are outside the Socialist ranks. All the world over, Socialism now means but one thing—namely, the nationalisation of the means of production and exchange; the abolition of individual capitalists and the substitution of State and municipal enterprise in their stead. But if all are agreed as to the doctrine—the ideal—the greatest disagreement still prevails as to the best means to reach this end. One thing is certain—that the movement should be international; and the Possibilists of Paris made the first notable effort to reunite the labour parties of different countries. They held the International Conference of Paris in 1883 and the International Congress of Paris in 1886. All the delegates present except the English trade unionists were Socialists. This followed the London International Trade Union Congress of 1888. The centenary celebration of the French Revolution and the Universal Exhibition of 1889 was the signal for the holding in Paris of innumerable international congresses. This time the Possibilists organized an international congress on a wider basis. To meet the views of the English trade unionists their previous congresses had been limited to the representatives of trade societies. The German Social Democrats had made this a pretext for not attending these congresses. Now, however, the congress was to be thrown open to purely political Socialist societies, as well as to trade societies. Consequently the English delegation consisted of trade unionists, of Fabians, and of members of the English Social Democratic Federation. This was the first time that English trade unionists and Socialists worked together. There was now no other reason for the non-attendance of the German Social Democrats than the hostility borne by their leaders towards the French Possibilist party. The Germans had taken under their special patronage a small section of French Socialists nicknamed the "Marxists" or "Guesdists." Though the French "Marxists" were so weak a party that they could not organize a congress without calling in the aid of great Ecologists, the Germans, nevertheless, preferred attending this, the so-called "Marxist" Congress. The Possibilists entrusted to the Belgian labour party the duty of convoking the next congress in 1891 at Brussels. M. Defaut was to be the international secretary in the interval. But M. Defaut subsequently resigned, and was succeeded by M. Volzels, who had not attended the Paris Congress, and altogether failed to carry out the instructions there given. Without consulting the parties from whom alone the Belgians had authority to act, he went over to the German Social Democrats, and altered the rules of the congress so as to please them and insure their presence. Thus the German Social Democratic party came into the movement. Though protesting against the irregularity of M. Volzels's conduct, the Possibilists and their friends in England attended the Brussels Congress, but only in small numbers and to see what was going to take place. On all sides it was felt that the union of all factions was a good thing, though the Possibilists regretted that it should have been brought about by a secret intrigue, instead of by a frank, open, free negotiation.

Under these delicate circumstances, no one dared say anything of a contentious character for fear of quarrelling, and the "Marxists," in all their speeches, showed themselves to be more Possibilist than the Possibilists themselves. Perfect harmony prevailed, and it was decided to meet again in two years at Zürich. The great question now is, whether the peace established at Brussels will be maintained at Zürich. Apart from personal animosities, the "Marxists" are accused by the Possibilists of seeking to centralize the leadership of the Socialist movement in the hands of their personal friends. They are accused of being autocratic. Nothing in the proposals now made by the German Social Democrats, or their satellites the French "Marxists," justifies this accusation; but the French Blanquists have taken the matter up and ruminated resolutions to the Zürich Congress demanding that there should be one name for the party in all countries and one international executive to govern the labour parties of all countries. Such suggestions are likely to be strenuously resisted. The Socialists of different nationalities should teach the same doctrines and help each other will be readily agreed upon, but when each in their own countries the Socialists will follow their own line of tactics and will obey orders from a central international committee or even from a congress. This was amply proved by the last May Day demonstration in London. At the Brussels Congress, after a lengthy discussion, the representatives of America, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland, Roumania, France, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Hungary unanimously voted that the demonstration in favour of the legal eight hours day should take place on the 1st of May. The English delegates alone voted against this resolution and proposed instead to hold the demonstration on the first Sunday in May. Surely if a congress is to have any influence over the tactics followed by Socialists in their own country, England should have bowed before such a crushing majority. Thirteen nationalities insisted that the demonstration should be held on the 1st of May. Yet, without paying the slightest attention to this emphatic decision, the English labour leaders forged all about the Brussels Congress, and held the demonstration on the first Sunday in May. After all, the English knew better than the 13 other nationalities what was the best thing to do in England. But after such remonstrance it will be somewhat absurd to talk of a central executive committee, of autonomy, and disciplinary obedience to orders in respect to international action and control.

What, then, remains for the Zürich Congress to do? There will probably be an attack upon those Socialists who think too much of getting into Parliament and too little of effecting an immediate improvement in the material condition of the working classes. There will be a good deal more said about the eight hours day, and the Women's Trade Union League of England has a resolution down to the effect that all legislation limiting the hours of labour should apply equally to men, so that women should not be handicapped in their struggle for existence. But the greatest debate will probably be on what Socialists can do to prevent war. The Germans say that war will not cease till the advent of Socialism. The Dutch propose a military strike, or a general strike in the event of war. The German resolution is not practical. The German resolution does not mean anything specific; so the English Social Democratic Federation has stepped in between the two, with a proposal to encourage by all means the convening of international committees and unions, such as the Postal Union, in the hope that these will gradually assimilate the legislation of different countries, and bring about the establishment of the United States of Europe. Such are the main subjects that will be discussed, and such, briefly, is the past history of the movement which has led up to the present meeting at Zürich. The debates last from the 6th to the 11th of August; and, to judge by the number of adhesions received, this will probably prove to be the greatest and the most influential congress of its sort ever held.

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The International Socialist and labour Congress at Zürich has come to an end, and the next of these epoch-making meetings is to be held three years hence in London. To judge from the tone of our Correspondent, himself a Socialist, the Zürich Congress has not given unqualified satisfaction to anybody. It spent three precious days, which ought to have been devoted to the regeneration of humanity, in debating the criteria of orthodoxy and in expelling heretics. Anarchists, as the outside observer learns with mild surprise, are not thought fit to propagate doctrines which seem to him sufficiently anarchic. It is, perhaps, even more puzzling to find that "independent socialists" are dubbed Anarchists by their better-drilled comrades, and are also expelled. An Organizational Council could not be more careful than the Zürich Congress to secure the double distilled orthodoxy of its members. It makes one almost despair of the progress of the species to find that after all this purification, so laboriously carried out, the true Socialist faith remains as disputable as ever. If we may believe the Germans they are the sole and original possessors of the grand secret. There is one faith and KARL MARX is its prophet, and HENRI FERRAZZINI is his consecrated successor—seems to be the creed of the militant Socialists of Germany. These daring subverters of the existing social order have not been able to emancipate themselves from the tyranny of the drill-sergeant. Our Correspondent gives an amusing account of the mechanical precision with which they voted at the word of command, and of the promptitude with which their fuglemen corrected any accidental failure to assume the authorized attitude. But the Socialists of other countries do not accept the gospel according to KARL MARX, and even resent the exclusive presentation of that great man's portrait. The French delegates cannot forget that France has produced some very thoroughgoing Socialist theories, and they resent the plastering of the walls with a very commonplace remark of the German prophet written in sixteen languages, when they can easily supply sixteen different prophets of their own, each capable of equally winged words. But they hold themselves in check until HENRI FERRAZZINI was suddenly produced upon the platform by a sort of coup de théâtre. Then their patience gave way and, after cheering the Commune with fine disregard of gossamer theories, they left the hall in a body.

Nevertheless, we learn with pleasure that Socialists now know what Socialism means in the abstract. They hold their ideal in common, though they differ considerably about the means of realizing it. Socialism now means all the world over "the nationalization of the means of production and exchange; the abolition of individual capitalists; and the substitution of State and municipal enterprise in their stead." This sounds very fine, but one has no difficulty in recognizing that the scope for difference of opinion about the way to realize it is and must remain very wide. It is unfortunate that the ideal which disposes so neatly of the individual capitalist makes no mention of the individual workman. We have a strong impression that he is likely to disappear quite as fast as the individual capitalist, and in that case "the means of production and exchange" will dwindle with so much rapidity that it is hardly worth while to consider whether they are to be nationalized or not. Nothing has yet been discovered capable of making the individual work with any degree of assiduity, except the hope of becoming an individual capitalist if only to the extent of his weekly wage. KARL MARX and the rest of them may be as profound as they are unintelligible, but one thing certain is that their industrial gospels have no adequate motive power. As humanity is constituted at present, it absolutely refuses to exert itself for anything so vague as a national owner of capital and employer of labour. If Socialists have any secret for transforming humanity, they had better begin by applying their nostrum. They may be well convinced that everything is as easy if that is possible, while nothing but mischief is possible until that is secured.

Our English Socialists are poor theorists, but they seem to have a better hold than their Continental friends of the truth that the way to approach the ideal is by slow and cautious economic changes, not by legislative revolutions. Proceeding in that way, they will discover as they go on what are the natural barriers to the vast changes contemplated by theory. The Dutch and German delegates were agreed in holding that political power is to be sought in order to effect a complete economic emancipation. They are putting the cart before the horse. There is no political power in this world, and there never will be one, capable of doing anything of the kind. Political movements are not the cause but the outward sign and expression of economic ones. We are getting past the barbarous stage of supposing that a record of battles and victories is a history of the world. Most of us have yet to learn that it is equally vain to look for the real history of nations in the record of their Parliamentary activity. If Socialists hope to do any good they must begin with the humble facts of everyday life, not with vague theories of nationalization. The more capital there is in the world the better it is for everybody, and the more its increase is checked the worse is it for working men in particular. What the Socialist reformer has to aim at is not the repression of the capitalist or the removal of any incentive to exertion that now exists. His real business is to make capitalists of those who at present have nothing, and he can do this only by making individual property secure for all alike, and teaching men to look to industry, efficiency, and sobriety for their enrolment in the ranks of capitalists.

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